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## THE PALE SHADE

*"The British soldiers fought in the pale shade of Aristocracy."*—Napier.

BY GILBERT MURRAY

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### I.

THE conception which one country entertains of another is always several generations out of date, and nearly always based on something romantic or startling. There are still plenty of Englishmen, and many more Frenchmen, who in their secret hearts conceive of America as a mixture of Bret Harte and the *Last of the Mohicans*, with a rather regrettable surface-dressing of skyscrapers and great inventors and millionaires mourning for their kidnapped sons. And I have noticed in American popular theatres traces of a belief that our farmers still dress in the costumes of George III's day, and that kings, princesses, earls, and—oddly enough—pickpockets play a more prominent part in our daily life than is warranted by experience. And neither party likes to lose its illusion. Our people are distinctly saddened when they hear that there are no more wild buffaloes and that Indians are taking university degrees, and sympathetic Americans are a little pained and incredulous when our statesmen describe England as a "great democracy" and discuss social problems without even mentioning the wishes of the King.

The momentous epoch when America broke from us and asserted her freedom inevitably still affects her national imagination. Her central enemy then was a British King. He was, as a matter of fact, the last of our kings who attempted anything like personal government; his ministers were not yet responsible to Parliament, nor did Parliament, in those days, represent the people. It is always difficult to realize that any place one has left does not look just the same as when one saw it last. And the national memory of America hardly realizes how rapidly England was beginning to

change even then, and how much more she has changed since.

The fact is that in some ways America is more old-fashioned than we are. Everyone knows that American speech contains many points in vocabulary and pronunciation which are not new developments but remnants of old classical English. And it is the same with the American Constitution. For example, the great emphasis which it lays on the separation of the Executive and the Legislature comes partly perhaps from Montesquieu, but chiefly from the old Colonial constitutions, in which the Governor was appointed directly by the Crown and not responsible to the Legislature. That is why the two are expected to check one another. Congress, even when the two houses agree, can have its will thwarted by the President, by the Supreme Court, and by the written Constitution. The British Parliament may not, even yet, represent the people quite as exactly as Congress does, but its will is unfettered. No executive, no supreme court and no constitution stands in its way.

Another reason why the old monarchical constitution of Great Britain makes such an impression on the popular mind in America is simply that it is romantic. People who have lived all their lives in England hardly realize this feeling of romance, but to an American, as to Canadians and Australians, it comes naturally. Kings, and Earls and Princesses . . . of course we will not for a moment allow them to oppress us or tax us, but which of us would not be rather sorry if they did not exist somewhere? What child, at any rate? I remember once finding two very intelligent children in tears because they had seen a prince for the first time and he had not come up to expectation. He was a German prince with a rather fine name, and he was coming to stay with the children's uncle, and they had climbed up a tree to see him driving from the station, and there he was, a rather nice fat little man in a bowler hat! Which of us does not sympathize with them?

De Quincey tells us of the emotion roused in him in his dreams by the tremendous name "Tiberius Claudius Nero, Consul Romanus"; I can remember in much the same way in the bush in Australia, a child who heard for the first time that there was somebody called "The Marquis of Lorne" and felt that the name was almost too beautiful for a human being. This state of feeling is not snobbishness: it is merely a natural love of the romantic. One can feel just the same

about a place-name; indeed the same child was quite intoxicated by the name "Arizona." It sounded like heaven, and he preferred to forget that a great river in Arizona was called Billy Williams.

But what I wish to point out is that this feeling is ever so much stronger where the objects in question are remote and only known through the imagination: much weaker, and almost non-existent, where they are familiarly present and known by ordinary contact. And consequently an American, accustomed to republican institutions and an atmosphere in which there are no titles except plain business titles, like Colonel or Doctor or President, almost always begins by over-rating greatly the importance of titles in English life. I do not lay such stress on the fact that distinguished men very frequently prefer not to have a title. Mr. Gladstone, Mr. Asquith, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Lloyd George and others could all have been peers if they had wished. These, it may be said, are politicians and naturally did not wish to leave the House of Commons. In that case they could all have been knights or baronets, or they might even, I suppose, have had Scotch or Irish titles and still stayed in the House of Commons. And it was not that they were deterred by any principles of rigid republican virtue. Merely the matter was not worth bothering about.

The essential point is that, when once a man is really distinguished and his name familiar, one forgets whether the name includes a title or not. It is often a convenient thing to give a very distinguished man, in his later age, a seat in the House of Lords, where there are no contested elections or all-night sittings. But no one reading the books of John Morley or James Bryce feels more respectful, or less interested, because the authors are now Viscounts. And, in cases where the title is born and not made, no one feels that Lord Robert Cecil is of higher social rank than his uncle, Mr. Balfour.

Where rank tells and "snobbishness" comes in is chiefly among people who are not otherwise known. If two quite unknown men are contesting a constituency and neither seems particularly brilliant or particularly objectionable, and one is called William Wilkinson and the other Lord Eustace Howard, of course the latter will have a preliminary advantage. Average voters will feel that they do know something about him after all; they will inquire whose son

he is. Their wives (and those wives' husbands too) will be pleased at attending his garden party or receiving his card. And, if you get away from the average to the extremes, some romantic Tories will adore him at first sight, and some idealist Radicals will make a point of being rude to him. Would things be very different in America if one of the candidates was called Quincy Adams or Lowell or even Bonaparte, or Astor or Vanderbilt, for that matter? I do not wish, however, to bring in considerations of mere wealth, as distinct from rank and titles. The power of wealth is, no doubt, very great indeed and mostly deplorable, in every modern democracy.

The fact is that in Great Britain the King and the House of Lords are both survivals. They are relics of a form of government and a structure of society that have both passed out of existence. In other countries they would have been swept away by a clean-cut revolution about the years 1830-1848, but the English habit in reform is never to go further than you really want. If your eye offends you, try shutting it for a bit; or use a little ointment or lotion; or give up reading by artificial light. But do not be such a fool as to have it taken out until you are perfectly certain you must. And still more, if your neighbor offends you: try to put up with him, try to get round him, try to diminish his powers in the particular point where he is most offensive; but do not hang him or shoot him unless he absolutely insists upon it; and, if you must fight him, do not forget that you will have to live with him or his friends afterwards.

It is this characteristic which has won for England two reputations which seem at first sight contradictory. She is known as the most Liberal of European nations and also as the most Conservative. Both statements are fairly true, and they both mean almost the same thing. She is Liberal because she believes in letting people do as they like and think as they like: she hates oppression and espionage and interference except where they are absolutely necessary for the public safety; and for that very same reason she is Conservative. She adapts herself to new conditions with as little disturbance as she conveniently can, and never destroys institutions or worries individuals for the sake of mere logical consistency. The people who praise her for being Liberal would seldom claim that she was specially Progressive. Those who call her Conservative would never think of her as

Reactionary. The fact is that, for various reasons, she has enjoyed greater security, both inside and out, than most European nations; and, being free from fear, she could afford, as a general rule, to be patient and good-natured.

## II.

Of these ancient undemocratic institutions which English Conservatism has left in being while in other democracies they have disappeared, the Crown is at once the most conspicuous and the most harmless. No king has ever asserted his will against that of the nation since George III, and no one seems to anticipate that any king is likely again to do so. Such republican feeling as there is in Great Britain—and it is markedly less than it was thirty years ago—is idealist and theoretic. It is not a protest against felt oppression; it is an echo from Mazzini and Kossuth and 1848, and, in the last few months, from the great wind of the Russian Revolution. The only grievance of a practical kind that could be charged against the monarchy is its supposed expensiveness. About half a million yearly is voted by parliament to the King's "Civil List." But then many of the services now charged to the Civil List would have to continue under any system; only instead of being put down under this heading, they would be under the Board of Works or Public Health or some other government department. And experts differ as to whether the expenses actually due directly and indirectly to the maintenance of the Crown are greater or less than the expenses of a recurrent Presidential election would be.

Another circumstance that weighs considerably with the British people, as it would with any other, is the personal liking and respect which the last three occupants of the throne have as a matter of fact inspired. They have all "played fair" and observed the Constitution. Queen Victoria was a great queen, and became by the end of her long reign an almost legendary being. Her ministers knew her as a very businesslike and hard-working and old-fashioned woman, with great knowledge of public affairs, and with strong principles and views of her own; but to the mass of the people she was a rather romantic figure, the little lady with her strictly puritan court and her widow's weeds, reigning unperturbed over such a vast and variegated empire. King Edward was

unpopular at his accession, but his famous tact and *bonhomie* together with his talent for public affairs won him eventually much esteem and liking even in those circles where his sporting proclivities were the reverse of a recommendation. And the respect felt for the present king is, I think, a perfectly genuine and democratic sentiment. The plain man cannot help admiring a young king who works hard, lives plainly, devotes himself to the public service and, in the matter of total abstinence during the war, has given the nation an example which most people have either followed or suspect in their hearts that they ought to have followed.

It is hard to tell, until the monarchy is in some way threatened, how deep this feeling may be. It is not comparable to the half-religious idolization of the Kaiser which is felt by many loyal Germans; but then the Kaiser plays for emotion as our kings do not, and the Kaiser's throne is supposed to be in danger, which is not the case with ours. I incline to the belief that the personal loyalty of most Englishmen to the Crown would prove to be a strong feeling if it were put to a strain. But it certainly makes no parade of itself.

The real strength of the monarchy lies in its practical convenience. It hurts no one, and it solves a number of difficult problems. The races of India and Egypt and Afghanistan understand loyalty to a king; many of them would not understand loyalty to a Parliament. Princes and Rajahs of ancient birth and accustomed to magnificence are flattered by a message from the King-Emperor, or his Viceroy: it might be less easy to win their homage for an elected official. More important than these considerations is the advantage of not having the head of the Empire a party-leader. Party feeling runs very high in Great Britain. Opinion in the colonies and the dominions is often greatly out of touch with opinion at home; it is generally more democratic, it is often less liberal. And it might make a strain on the loyalty, say, of Indian soldiers and officials if a radical leader, whom they were accustomed to curse every morning at tiffin, were suddenly made the chief magistrate of the Empire. As it is the King has no politics, and people of all views can be loyal to him. He represents something permanent amid the changes of ministries, something that seems to be England itself, and, if people feel disposed to idealize it, does nothing to prevent them.

The same consideration has some force at home also. When party feeling is strong a change of government produces a great strain; but it would be a far greater strain if the hated head of the opposite political party became actually the President of the whole British people. As it is the Crown and the civil service remain unchanged, so the beaten party can comfort itself; the whole government of the nation has not quite been given over into the hands of the wicked!

America knows by her own experience the particular difficulty here mentioned. It could be surmounted without much difficulty so far as Great Britain herself is concerned. It is the relation of Great Britain to the other parts of the Empire that makes the monarchy so extremely helpful. A few months ago, when events in Russia set us all talking of republican ideals, General Smuts, the famous Boer statesman and soldier, whose campaigns have been among the most successful in this war, had occasion to make a speech about the future of the Empire. He was by birth a republican. He still dislikes, as most of us do, the word "Empire." He emphasized strongly the truth that the British "commonwealth of nations" is in its essence both democratic and republican. But one of the most striking parts of his speech was a plea for the absolute necessity of maintaining the Crown as a centre for the loyalty of the whole group. Apart from the arguments given above he insisted that the only alternative to the Crown would be a President elected not by Great Britain, but by the votes of some five hundred million people, scattered over all parts of the world, in communities with different franchises, different customs, different constitutions and even standing at different stages of civilization. Such an election is an impossibility; and if it were possible it is just the kind of thing that might split the Empire into hostile groups. And one after another every Colonial statesman who is present in England has repeated his words with emphasis. Republican institutions by all means; but let it be "A Crowned Republic."

By the British Constitution the King is a mythical being built up by a mass of legal fictions. He is king "by the Grace of God"; he can do no wrong; he never dies; he is never under age; he cannot be taxed; he cannot be arrested. Conversely he is the only person in the realm who cannot arrest a suspected criminal, because if he arrested by mistake an innocent man, no action at law could be taken against



him, and therefore there would be "a wrong without a remedy"! He is also the fountain of justice and the fountain of honor, and the sole repository of the prerogative of pardon. But when you examine into the meaning of all these wonderful statements they melt into mist. He does no wrong because he never does anything. He cannot act except by the advice of his ministers. And his ministers are the leaders of the political party which represents the majority of the nation. He pardons criminals or reduces their sentences, but only when the Home Secretary on behalf of the Government advises him to do so. He is the fountain of honor and he alone can create peers; but he only creates those whom the Prime Minister recommends. No Act of Parliament is valid without his signature, and he can in theory refuse to sign. But it is over 200 years since Queen Anne refused the royal assent to a certain Scotch Militia Act, and no sovereign since has attempted to follow her example. At a few great constitutional crises, like the passing of the Reform Bill, the hotheads of the minority party have talked of persuading the King to veto some bill which they thought particularly monstrous; but they have never had their way.

Does the King then really count for nothing? No; clearly it would not be true to say that. But it is very hard to say what his power actually is. Though he cannot ever overrule the ministers with whom the House of Commons provides him, it must be remembered that he is always in office whereas the ministers change. He sees a great deal of the most important business of state. He gets to know all the persons of political importance in the Kingdom. If he is a man of character himself or a good judge of character in others, he is pretty sure to obtain sooner or later a considerable personal influence, dependent not on his supposed prerogative but on his experience and position. Published memoirs enable us to say with confidence that in the last generation a proposal which had the approval of King Edward or of Queen Victoria had generally a smoother career than one which those sovereigns thought harmful. But of course there would be no question in either case of the Crown setting itself up against the known will of parliament.

It is true then, that, to a slight extent, in a matter where the will of Parliament and people was not clear, and minis-

ters were not interested or were divided among themselves, the wish of the King, a hereditary and unrepresentative officer, might be the deciding force. That is, as far as it goes, a defect in the British Constitution from the stand-point of pure democracy. But there are few democracies in the world that have not worse defects than that.

The ardent republican will no doubt insist upon something more fundamental, "The Crown," he will say, "produces inevitably a false social atmosphere. The air of the Court, with its immense interest in small personal questions, with its honors and distinctions which depend on the pleasure of particular individuals, with its regard for hereditary rank and its false standards in judging the world, is an influence essentially hostile to human dignity and to the spiritual equality of man with man. It concentrates attention on itself, and, among the masses of thoughtless people at any rate, that means concentrating attention on a wrong object. When George III was speaking with Dr. Johnson certainly most people in England would have been more interested in listening to the King than to the philosopher. And if instead of Dr. Johnson, His Majesty had been speaking to Socrates and George Washington and Shakespeare all at once, I daresay it would have been much the same. When Burke was studying the French Revolution he was so dazzled by the thought of the suffering Queen that he could not see the social and economic distresses of the people of France. "He pitied the plumage and forgot the dying bird," and that is just the state of mind which the false glitter of monarchy leads to.

This argument, as far as it goes, is probably quite true: but it is just the sort of argument that middle-aged Englishmen, as a rule, are not much affected by. A Frenchman or an Italian perhaps feel it more. An Englishman is apt to smile indulgently and say he sees what you mean, but that after all in practice he thinks there is not much harm done, and that snobbish people would be just as snobbish without a Court as with one.

The question is difficult to argue. But at the present day a King who is strictly constitutional in his action and respected for his personal character, confronted by the problem of holding together in one commonwealth a series of scattered nations, who all accept the Crown with ease and loyalty but might quarrel like tigers over the election of a

common President, and might even in some cases refuse to obey him when elected, I think Brutus himself would hesitate to overthrow the Crown and proclaim a British Republic. And I am sure George Washington would.

### III.

The House of Lords is a far greater check on the working of British democracy than the Crown. The Crown never throws out bills. The House of Lords has done so pretty frequently, at least when the Liberals were in power and the bills not suited to their Lordships' taste. And except for money bills, the assent of the Lords is or was until lately as necessary as that of the Crown.

Yet even here the case is not quite what it seems. The House of Lords does feel the weakness of its position. It knows that it is not representative, and that if it really thwarts the people's will seriously its days are numbered. It does not claim equal power with the Commons. It claims a power of delay. Normally it accepts measures passed by the House of Commons, but it claims, in Lord Lansdowne's words, the right and duty "to arrest the progress of such measures whenever we believe that they have been insufficiently considered and that they are not in accord with the deliberate judgment of the country." If the country shows that it does approve the said measures, the House of Lords immediately retires. The Senate of the United States would hardly be so modest, nor yet the French Senate.

The claim is theoretically modest but in practice it has amounted to a good deal. It has meant that when after the huge expense and trouble of a general election a Liberal Government came into power, the House of Lords could "arrest the progress" of all its measures until they were confirmed by another general election. This was a great burden. And it was made worse by the fact that if the Conservative party was in power, the Lords passed their bills without question. That is to say, the real objection is not so much to the claim of a Second Chamber to amend or delay legislation of which it does not approve; it is rather to the unsatisfactory constitution of the Second Chamber itself. On this point opinion is agreed, and while I write a Parliamentary Commission formed of all parties is trying to

frame a scheme for a reformed Second Chamber. In the meantime the Parliament Act, passed by Mr. Asquith's Government, secures that any bill which is passed by the Commons three times in three successive sessions shall become law even without the assent of the Lords. The Lords can delay a measure for two years, but not more, unless indeed the Government responsible for the measure fails to stay in power.

It seems rather unnecessary to discuss the powers of the House of Lords when a scheme for amending those powers and reconstituting the House itself is actually under consideration. But it is worth while remarking that in practice a power of delay is an exceedingly powerful weapon. Every reformer knows how every little extra obstacle in the path of reform tells. You can just, by long educational efforts, get a majority for your reform in the country or in the House of Commons. If you are then told that the majority must be "clearly decisive," that the country must be consulted again to make sure that it knows what it is doing, that your measure must be submitted to a referendum or a royal commission and delayed until by the natural swing of the pendulum public opinion has changed and your majority disappeared, that is the kind of thing that reformers find hard to bear. And when, as with the House of Lords, the body which exercises the power of "delay" is emphatically a class body with strong class interests, and a steady conservative majority, they find it harder still. So many of the best and most important measures in the past have been won by small majorities, and have had no force of overwhelming public demand behind them.

The House of Lords is, from the political point of view, a body hard to defend. It is unrepresentative, it is too large, it is drawn too predominantly from one class, and that a class whose interests are exceptionally exposed to criticism. Such a Second Chamber stands condemned. Yet we may put in some pleas in mitigation of sentence. It would be wrong to conceive of the House of Lords as a great mass meeting of nearly seven hundred hereditary landowners sitting permanently to obstruct all Liberal reforms. It is only on very rare occasions that the mass of peers—the "backwoodsmen" as they are called—turn up to vote; only on the great party issues, such as the Home Rule Bill, the Parliament Bill and the like. On ordinary occasions the House

of Lords is attended by some forty to sixty members, nearly all of them serious, eminent and hard-working public men, and a good number of them Liberals.

The ranks of the peerage are recruited every year by new creations; and, to one who does not expect too much of our frail human nature, especially in a region where it is apt to be seen at its frailest, the new creations, though far from ideal, are, on the whole, by no means unrespectable. The obviously bad appointments attract lively public interest; the good ones pass by unnoticed. Of course mere money bags count far too much; of course party services are unduly rewarded. Of course the people who work and scheme industriously to get a title are more likely to receive one than those who do not. Occasionally there is a scandal. One or two have echoed across the Atlantic. But if you make a list of the most recent peers you will find among them a very large proportion of men who are at the head of their respective professions or walks of life, especially of course if they have been engaged in law or public administration. Turn up the record of a few old House of Lords debates and notice the speakers. You will find first several of these recent peers, whose rank is not hereditary but has been conferred on them for public services: Lord Cromer, a very great governor who reformed the finances of Egypt; Lord Morley, the famous radical philosopher and man of letters, friend of Mr. Gladstone and John Stuart Mill; Lord Milner, an extreme imperialist who is strongly distrusted in Liberal circles but certainly achieved his peerage by hard work and personal qualities; Lord Loreburn, a great lawyer and a former Liberal Lord Chancellor; Lord Courtney, formerly Chairman of Committees in the House of Commons, a leading radical and pacifist; Lord Parmoor, a Conservative lawyer; two or three Bishops, some very conservative, some moderate like the Archbishop of Canterbury, some Socialist, like the Bishop of Oxford. Then there are many peers whose title is hereditary, but who would probably have attained eminence in whatever rank of life they had been born: Lord Rosebery, the famous orator; Lord Crewe, Lord Lansdowne, the very accomplished leaders of the Liberal and Conservative peers respectively; Lord Curzon, a great traveller, a distinguished ex-Viceroy of India, and a man of academic distinction. These are all men whose opinion is of real importance, and who probably ought

to be members of any second chamber, however democratically constructed. Then there are a number of successful business men, brewers, doctors, and men of science.

The House of Lords on ordinary days is not at all an unsatisfactory senate. An old friend of the writer, a Liberal of undoubted soundness and an enthusiastic admirer of Abraham Lincoln, avers that on ordinary occasions, where no great party question is at issue, he finds the debates in the House of Lords better than those which he remembers in the Commons. Above all there is more freedom, and more power of expressing unpopular views. When certain Quakers and other Conscientious Objectors to military service were shown to have been harshly or unfairly treated, the best statement of their case was made in the House of Lords. When the Government, by way of "reprisals" against German cruelty sent an expedition to drop bombs on the open town of Freiburg, by far the best and most effective protest was made in the House of Lords—and made by Liberals, Bishops and Conservatives alike. Again when abstruse questions affecting remote parts of the world come up for debate, there are generally some peers present who have special knowledge of them. Only those peers attend who are really interested in public affairs; there is no obstruction or "filibustering," no "talking out" of proposals, no threats by party leaders against their too independent followers. There is just the one absolutely fatal defect, that, whenever the Conservative leader thinks fit to take the trouble, he can whip up an overwhelming majority to destroy any Liberal bill; and that majority will consist largely of quite undistinguished and unpolitical persons, some few of them perhaps of indifferent character and intelligence, and most of them not known to him by sight.

It is England all over, this anomalous and indefensible institution, which generally happens to work rather well because most of its members do not attend, and has not—until lately—made itself so serious an obstacle to progress and the popular will that the nation was willing to take the trouble of "ending or mending it." However, reform is now inevitable. The only question is whether the House of Lords itself will consent to a reform sufficiently thorough to satisfy the feeling of the country, or whether it prefers to follow the counsel of its own "Die-hards" and "Last-ditchers," and will go down fighting. It will no longer be a

grave obstacle to the progress of democracy. That may be taken as certain.

If you consulted at this moment the feeling of radical and socialist circles in Great Britain you would probably find comparatively little bitterness against the House of Lords; rather the reverse. It has proved itself the one place where the unpopular views of the pacifists can be fully expressed and accorded a courteous hearing. The real object of bitterness would be the pseudo-democratic capitalist press—which is quite another story.

#### IV.

“This is all very well,” an American reader may say: “It may be that your King has no political power and your House of Lords is having its claws clipped at the moment, so far as the poor things needed clipping. But you are an aristocratic nation. We know it in our bones. We feel it when we meet Englishmen. The first thing they ask about a man is whether he is or is not a ‘gentleman,’—it is the all important question. And the answer to it seems to depend neither on the man’s moral qualities, which we would respect, nor on the size of his income, which we could at least understand, but on the abstruse points connected with his pronunciation, and his relatives, and the way he wears his necktie. Your aristocrats are supposed to have exquisite manners, but as a matter of fact they often offend us. They are too much accustomed to deference from common people; they stand aside and expect to be waited on. And, when we go to England, we may not see as much gross luxury as in New York or Newport, but we do see that life is made extraordinarily comfortable for the ‘upper classes,’ and for them alone. They do no doubt care about the ‘poor’; they are charitable and they are public-spirited; but they despise, or, at any rate, they exclude from their society whole classes of people who seem to us just as good as they are—commercial men, wealthy shop-keepers, leaders of industry and others, just because they have not the same way of talking.”

Now there is some truth in this, and some falsehood. And it is exceedingly difficult to unravel the two, even in the roughest and most elementary way. I should not dare to attempt it if I were a born Englishman, educated at Eton

or Winchester. Because in that case, I believe I should think it mere nonsense. But, having come to England from Australia, and been at one time a stranger to the well-to-do English public-school society which sets the tone in the British upper class, I think I can understand the criticism.

It is a fact that in Great Britain the aristocracy, which America on the whole shook off when it shook off the British connection, still survives and is in some ways still powerful. And I think, perhaps, in no way more than this: that its standard of behavior and minor morals is more or less accepted as a model by the whole nation. It is true that Englishmen, more than other nations, do consider whether a man is a gentleman; and the average Englishman of all classes normally considers that he himself is a gentleman and expects to be treated as one. This may sound like mere servility or class-worship; but of course it is not that. It does not mean that the average man tries to behave exactly as he has seen some earl or viscount behave, or as he reads that such persons did behave in the eighteenth century. It means that a certain ideal has been formed of the way in which a "gentleman" ought to behave, and that practically every self-respecting British citizen feels himself—theoretically at least—bound to live up to it.

It is in part a class imitation and in part a genuine moral standard; it is based in part on snobbishness and in part on idealism. That is just what gives it its power. It appeals to every kind of person. No doubt it would be far better to aim at being a philosopher or a true Christian; but thousands of people who have no ambition in either of those directions will be very strong on conducting themselves like gentlemen. And some will do it in a superficial way and some in a sincere and searching way.

This mixture of social class and moral ideal is, of course, a normal thing in human history. Most of our words of moral praise or blame are in their origin class words: "nobility," "villainy," "gentleness," "simplicity," "generosity," "baseness," "courtesy," and the like. They all originally denoted the supposed quality of a social class, though by now one has forgotten the connection. In a generation or two the word "gentleman" will no more connote the observed behavior of the "upper classes" than the word "villain" now connotes the natural qualities of an agricultural laborer. But I think it happens to be charac-



teristic of Great Britain, as compared with the other great democratic nations, that it is profoundly permeated at present by this ambiguous and confused standard, a quarter serenity and three quarters idealism.

Every one is tempted, of course, to satirize the ideal of the "gentleman." Its manifold inconsistencies invite satire. But the satire of such ideals is apt to be even more superficial than the ideals themselves. Think of Don Quixote trying to live up to the standard of the Knight Errant; of Mr. Conrad's "Lord Jim" trying to live up to the standard of the long-forgotten White Men. Ridiculous if you like: but the main feeling which they excite should not be ridiculed. Of course I cannot define a gentleman; no one can. I should find it difficult even to describe a gentleman, especially when every one who is likely to read these words already knows quite well what it means. It would be like trying to describe in words the taste of white bread—which most people know already and those who do not could never learn from the description.

For one thing it is hard to say in England what anyone means when he speaks of "the aristocracy." In the eighteenth century it would have been fairly clear; but the old British aristocracy has been far from exclusive. It has intermarried with other classes; it has accepted the democratic revolution, it has taken up whatever work came to its hand, it has served in the House of Commons and on County Councils and the like and made friends of its colleagues, to such an extent that no one can now say where the aristocracy ends and the middle classes begin. Mr. Belloc in his satires speaks generally of the "governing classes" and pretends that they do what they like with England. But they are not the aristocracy, nor are they identical with "gentlefolk." They consist, I suppose, of the people who hold leading positions in politics or government, together with their families and friends. They may be Labor Members or dukes or millionaires or politicians or popular journalists or fashionable explorers. They live near the centre of things, with their hands convenient to the handles that make things move. Such people are powerful in every nation, and the bigger the nation the greater is their power. If good places are going, these people and their nominees are likely to get a rather speedier and more sympathetic consideration than other persons equally worthy, or more so, who happen to

live in Cornwall or the Hebrides and know nobody in London. It is not a question of undue influence, much less of corruption. It is merely that, as in all large modern states, some people are more conspicuous than others without being by any means more meritorious.

If the "governing classes" are not of necessity aristocrats, neither are they of necessity "gentlefolk," while their supposed rivals from Cornwall and the Hebrides very likely may be. When we come to "gentlefolk" we are at the heart of the matter. There is here, for good or evil, or both together, something profoundly characteristic of English feeling. The feeling is instinctive and unreasoned, and is therefore very subtle and delicate, very inconsistent and logically indefensible, yet intensely dear to British habits of thought. I believe this is the one country in Europe where a working man feels himself insulted if anyone suggests that he is "not a gentleman." A self-respecting workman or small shopkeeper in France—and perhaps in America—would base his self-respect on the Equality of mankind; in Germany or old Russia on his worthy performance of the duties of his class, including that of obedience to his betters. In England, I think, he recognizes the existence of higher and lower standards of social conduct, and prides himself on practising the higher.

Regarded historically, this means that a certain ideal of feeling and conduct which was incumbent several centuries ago upon the nobility has spread gradually in wide waves, and of course with some modifications, over the whole people. It is self-respect but more than self-respect. The old conception at its highest was expressed in the motto "*Noblesse Oblige*," "*High rank imposes obligations*." The noble had enormous advantages in life and he was bound in honor to make repayment for them. Common people obeyed him, worked for him, waited upon him, paid rent to him, saw that he lived in leisure and plenty and regarded him frankly as their superior. In return he had to act in a way worthy of his supposed superiority. He must be honorable and fearless; never betray those who trusted in him; and preserve a certain cleanness of soul to correspond with the cleanness of person and linen which was one of his privileges. Of course, when you enquire into the psychological origins of "gentlemanly" conduct, a great deal of it can be resolved into that "pride of idleness" and "pride of waste" which

Dr. Veblen and others have so amusingly analyzed. It may be that, to some fractional extent, in the last analysis, a gentleman does not haggle about money because he likes to act as if he were too rich to mind; that he does not push or boast or intrigue because he likes to think he is already so great that he need not bother to attain higher greatness; that he does not lie because if he did it might look as if he was afraid of somebody. But, whatever the psychological origin, the result is something rather splendid; and the supposed origins are by now very far away and certainly do not hold good of the mass of "gentlefolk."

Of course I do not say that any class in the world ever lived consistently up to these ideals, any more than professing Christians live up to the ideals of Christianity. Nor do I suggest for a moment that the ideals themselves are either sublime or consistent. They may allow a man to be more afraid of walking down Piccadilly in a frock coat and bowler hat than of neglecting to pay his tailor's bill. But they are based on a real instinct and they have a way of seizing on those points of superficial conduct which correspond to something that lies deep in human nature.

To take a typical case. The gentleman is apt to be also, in the metaphorical sense, a "sportsman." Indeed it is through the common English interest in games and sports that the ideal has spread so widely. All classes meet on the county cricket field. And there is no point on which the rule is clearer than on proper behavior in a game. A gentleman if beaten must not sulk. If given "out" by the umpire when in his own opinion he is not out, he must not swear and make a scene. He must never lightly accuse people of cheating. These things seem small but they probe human nature very deep, and when transferred to the more serious issues of life there is a kind of majesty about them. And they are keenly felt. I can remember hearing some radical north-country coal-miners warmly praising a Conservative Prime Minister because, when intrigued against by some of his followers and largely superseded by a colleague, he had never shown public resentment or allowed his friendly relations with the said colleague to be interrupted. And I have heard similar praises of a Liberal Prime Minister in a similar situation by people who were out of sympathy with his politics. In each case the man "behaved like a gentleman." And the plain Britisher often

has the feeling that he does not quite understand difficult questions of policy, but he does "know a gentleman when he sees one." And to leap suddenly to the other end of the scale, I cannot resist repeating a story which I heard years ago from an official dealing with prisons: how he had once received a petition signed by nearly all the convicts in a particular institution protesting that one of their companions was behaving "in a way unbecoming to a gentleman." It was not exactly against the rules, but they found it difficult to put up with. The man was in the habit of putting crumbs on his windowsill to attract the tame pigeons, and when they came he grabbed them and wrung their necks. He thought it "sport," but it was not what a gentleman calls sport. It had "brought upon him the disgust of every right minded person in this prison."

So on this point I have to plead guilty on behalf of my country. The English are still rather haunted by this old class ideal and are to that extent an aristocratic nation. They like the standards of "gentlefolk" and when they see the external signs they perhaps do tend too hastily to believe in the inward and spiritual grace. I remember a democratic Frenchman complaining to me that an Englishman who had been at a public school or a university, and had so acquired the manner belonging to those places, had extraordinary and, as it seemed to him, iniquitous privileges. Say he was on a walking tour in a strange part of the country and his money ran out, he could get almost any hotel to cash a cheque for him—and that even if his clothes were ragged and he had walked through the soles of his boots! All I could plead in answer was that, evidently, the people who had that manner were known, as a matter of fact, to be honest, and that was why the hotels trusted them. No doubt it was hard on other people who were equally honest but happened not to bear any well-known signs of the fact upon their persons. But it was not to the discredit of the public schoolboys.

I do not know if this story of the English hotels is true but something very similar is true of hotels in Switzerland. I once asked a large hotel proprietor near Zermatt if it was true that he always cashed English visitors' cheques when they asked him and he said "yes he did; and he never lost by it." And I happened to have heard since that afterwards, by some error, the wrong sort of man got in at one of these hotels—the sort of man who ought by rights to have

gone to Monte Carlo. And he drew a cheque and it was cashed and he departed and the cheque was not honored. And the other English guests at the hotel made the sum up between them, so that English cheques are still honored in that hotel.

Of course this applies only to Switzerland. It would not apply to the Riviera, or to Paris or the towns on the way to Paris. The English visitors to Switzerland are to an overwhelming degree "gentlefolk"—parsons, university dons, schoolmasters, civil servants, lawyers and such like. And whatever you may think of the failings of that class of persons (Mr. Shaw can tell you all and more than all about them) you can within certain limits be sure of the way they will behave. You know at least the sort of thing they will not do.

You know what they will not do. And for a very great part of life that is what you most want to know about people on whom you depend. Especially it is what you want to know in matters of government and administration, and it must never be forgotten that a quite enormous proportion of the English upper class is occupied in that work. That is the result of having a great and highly qualified civil service and a world wide empire. In administration you are dependent on all your colleagues. It would no doubt be delightful if many of them were brilliantly original and imaginative and saintly and eloquent and all the rest of it. But it is essential that all of them should have a certain known standard of behavior and stick to it. And that is what the governing classes believe they get by having the services permeated, consciously or unconsciously, by the ideal of the "gentleman."

## V.

All this, as I re-read it, sounds somewhat oligarchical, somewhat inconsistent with the true and complete ideal of democracy. But the truth is that no democracy can thrive without a wide-spread and vigorous sense of self-respect and mutual respect among its members. And the British democracy has set about acquiring that sense by the means that happened for historical reasons to lie ready to its hand. In an old aristocratic society, such as existed in the eighteenth century, where only the select Few were really re-

spected, wider and wider circles of the nation determined to live up to the standard of that Few in honor and courtesy and self-discipline, and so to earn the respect which that standard gave.

I do not feel ashamed when I think of it. If the standard were, owing to the war, to break down, as some people say it will, I should be bitterly sorry, not glad. When I heard people attack a late Foreign Minister on the ground that he was "too much of a gentleman for the work that is wanted in war," I found it difficult within the limits of gentlemanly language to express the vehemence of my dissent. I will not for a moment plead, on behalf of my country, that she once had these somewhat aristocratic standards but is now throwing them over. And the majority of any working class audience in the country will feel as I do.

We want to democratize the country, true, but we do not want to vulgarize it. Just the reverse. I remember twenty years ago hearing two members of Parliament discuss who was the truest gentleman in the House of Commons, and the choice fell on a Northumberland miner, sent by his fellow miners to represent them. It is not from the working classes that any danger to this ideal will come. Money and intrigue and insincerity and lying advertisement: those are the enemies to true "gentleness," not hard work nor poverty.

We are no doubt still affected by the tradition of the aristocracy which once governed Great Britain, a tradition already made legendary and greatly idealized. The class of gentlefolk has enormously widened and no man living is necessarily shut out from it. It still largely fills the civil service and governs the outlying portions of the empire. The public services are now, with few exceptions, filled by open competitive examination. The examinations are severe and skillful, and their fairness has never been questioned. If the services still remain somewhat select and aristocratic, that is because the higher education has in Great Britain, as in all industrial societies, remained too much a privilege of the upper and middle classes. We must not forget the immense and steady effort made to counteract this tendency from the Renaissance onwards. No nation has had such rich provision for the education of "poor scholars" as England had after the foundation of the great public schools. No nation has such a system of "scholarships," or large

money prizes lasting for four years or so, and open to the best pupils in competitive examinations in all parts of the country. The present writer was supported almost entirely by scholarships from the age of fourteen to the age of twenty-three, and could not have got through the University otherwise. So it is not for him to complain of the exclusion of poor boys from the highest education that England can provide. And his case is perfectly normal and common. If you look through the lists of "scholars" and "exhibitioners" compiled by several Oxford colleges of recent years you will find a majority coming from homes by no means wealthy and a large proportion actually from the working class. And these men go on to fill high positions in the civil service, politics, the law, the Church or other "gentlemanly" professions. And, if this was done under the old system with its "great Public Schools," with high fees, numbering less than a hundred all told, how much more will be done when the new State-aided Secondary Schools, numbering over nine hundred already, with very low fees and an abundance of free places and university scholarships, have begun to exert their full influence in the national education? Of course we must not delude ourselves. It remains difficult, by any measures of public help, entirely to get over the inherent disadvantages to a working-class child of the poverty of its parents. They will want it to bring in wages at once instead of improving its education. They will not be able to provide it at home with a background of cultured thought or interesting conversation. However, we see those difficulties and we mean to face them. I must not allow them now to make me digress from my main subject. . . . Hitherto the public services and learned professions, the original preserves of the "upper classes," have absorbed without any loss of standard, indeed with a considerable rise in standard, the hundreds of "poor scholars" who came to them from the old Public Schools and Universities. They will absorb equally the thousands of chosen boys and girls who come from the new Secondary Schools and the cheap modern Universities.

I have spoken of the civil side of life, since that is the only side of which I have personal knowledge. The army and navy used to be the great strongholds of aristocratic privilege, the impregnable fortresses of anti-liberal thought. The famous phrase quoted at the head of this essay has lin-

gered in men's memories. But it is well to remember that it referred to the England of 1812, and even then only to the army. The army of 1917 is very different from the army of a hundred years ago, or even of three years ago. The soldier in whom the nation now places its chief trust, Sir William Robertson, was himself a working man. Promotions from the ranks are now the rule, not the exception. I make no profession of knowing the army from inside; but I believe one is safe in saying that if the nation as a whole is moving forward in a democratic direction the opposite tendency will find no stronghold any longer in the army. The British soldier fights no more "in the pale shade of aristocracy."

Yet the standard of honor remains untouched. War makes good men do horrible things; there is no shutting of the eyes to that. Yet I believe all good judges will agree that our soldiers now have more chivalry, not less, than those of Wellington.

There are bad symptoms here and there: vulgarities, meannesses, intrigues and blatancies. Such things exist in every large society, and a state of long and desperate warfare calls them into prominence. But on the whole, there is no visible decay in the strength of that ideal of manners which is descended originally from a bye-gone aristocracy but is now felt to be part of the birthright of every free Briton: an obligation imposed on him by his own freedom and by the position which his race holds in the world. How can a member of so great a Commonwealth consent to be anything but a Gentleman? A rule of duty as of the strong towards the weak, courage and gentleness, no bullying and no intrigue: it may be based ultimately on mere pride, but it is better to be proud of these qualities than of their opposites. And such pride, as America herself is the best witness, is no bad ornament to a great and sovereign democracy.

GILBERT MURRAY.